

CLIMATE & MENTAL HEALTH

STRONGMINDS®



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is more than sadness; it's a debilitating disorder that can affect anyone at any time. Often described as enduring physical and mental exhaustion, depression disrupts daily life, impairing a person's ability to focus, accomplish everyday tasks, and take steps to improve life.

Untreated depression can erode self-esteem and lead to interpersonal conflict, social isolation, poor health, financial instability, substance abuse, and high-risk sexual behavior, all of which can create feedback loops.

ABOUT US

StrongMinds is a nonprofit founded in 2013 to provide life-changing depression treatment to low-resource communities globally, with a primary focus in sub-Saharan Africa.

Our evidence-based group talk therapy model (IPT-G) is delivered by trained lay community members, enabling us to reach hundreds of thousands of people each year.

MENTAL HEALTH AT RISK DUE TO CLIMATE STRESSORS

- The mental health impact of natural disasters can exceed physical injuries **40 to one**.
- Droughts, floods, and extreme storms can **claim lives, destroy homes and crops, and ruin livelihoods**.
- Resource scarcity can lead to **interpersonal conflict, gender-based violence, theft of land and livestock**.
- Many **infectious disease outbreaks**, such as cholera, can be traced back to **cyclones and floods**. These outbreaks can trigger or worsen depression symptoms.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

StrongMinds is providing depression treatment to people living on the frontlines of the climate crisis in Africa.

Our six-week group talk therapy intervention focuses on improving self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and personal agency as key elements to recovery.

Group members work together to process and cope with the impact of changing and extreme weather on their livelihoods, and support each other in rebuilding after catastrophic events.

ADVOCACY

StrongMinds is an anchor member of **Care of People x Planet (COP2)**, a coalition focused on accelerating psychological resilience to the climate crisis.

SUSAN'S STORY

In July 2022, Eastern Uganda's Mbale District was hit by a catastrophic flood, leaving a trail of ruin and destruction. Susan was just one of many who lost her home in the deluge as the bursting banks of the neighboring rivers Nabuyonga and Namatala overwhelmed the area. What's more, Susan's husband could not work after the catastrophe, and their children were forced to leave their private school due to a lack of income and shelter. Overwhelmed and devastated, Susan retreated into a life of isolation.

"I felt like the whole world had crumbled around me," Susan said. "I was struggling to cope. Then, I met a StrongMinds volunteer who talked to me about depression and encouraged me to join a therapy support group." Initially reluctant, Susan ultimately decided to give therapy a chance. Little did she know it would be life-changing. Over the next eight weeks, StrongMinds would become her lifeline.

"I connected with other people who had experienced similar losses and who understood what I was going through.

Throughout StrongMinds' therapy, Susan understood that the effects of climate change extend far beyond the physical devastation caused by natural disasters, often leaving a profound impact on mental health. "Losing everything I had was a traumatic experience," she admits, "but with the help of the StrongMinds support group sessions, I was able to overcome depression and find ways to rebuild my life." Today, Susan is forever grateful to StrongMinds for the counseling she received and for the chance to share her story of resilience and hope.

RECENT CLIMATE-RELATED EVENTS

AFFECTING COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

KENYA

- A **cyclone in 2024** caused extreme flooding in Nairobi and Mombasa counties.

UGANDA

- Catastrophic **flash floods** in Mbale in 2022 killed 22 people and destroyed homes and crops.
- A **hail storm** in Bugiri in 2022 destroyed subsistence crops, ruining livelihoods and causing food insecurity for StrongMinds clients.
- **Droughts** in Kotido increasing **conflict and violence** among pastoralists, frequently cited as trigger for depression among clients.

ZAMBIA

- **Historic flooding** in Dec 2023 to Jan 2024 led to massive cholera outbreak, leading to school closures.
- May/June 2024 **droughts** in Zambia, which relies on hydro power, triggered rolling blackouts affecting the livelihoods of millions.

OUR RESULTS

To-date, we have treated more than 622,000 people for depression in sub-Saharan Africa.

On average, **74%** of clients who complete therapy are depression-free, with the results sustained six months later.

LEARN MORE

www.strongminds.org

